

CHAPTER 15

RADIO AND TELEVISION INTERVIEWING

One of the most difficult tasks you will encounter as a Navy journalist is serving as a radio and television interviewer. In the space of a few minutes, an interviewer must draw out answers and reveal the attitudes of an interviewee that would normally take hours or even days of ordinary conversation. He must do it with various types of people, in front of cameras, under hot lights and in front of microphones.

As a broadcaster serving at an NBS detachment or aboard a SITE-equipped ship, you will conduct a wide variety of radio and television interviews. Your interview subjects may be from within the command — for example, PN1(AW) Ellaverc, the command Sailor of the Year; Lt. Cmdr. Bilge, the newly reported chief engineer and former Miami Dolphins special teams player; or SA Maru, the mess cook who rescued a drowning youngster from a public swimming pool. Conversely, you may be asked to interview music and motion picture stars, politicians, community leaders and coaches of youth sports teams.

Regardless of the importance or prominence of the subject, you must not forget to take the following three actions to make every radio and television interview a success:

- Extract the facts
- Emphasize the important details
- Keep the audience informed

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the most common types of radio and television interviews.

With few exceptions, interviews for radio and television are generally in one of the following three categories which are covered in the succeeding text:

- Opinion
- Information
- Personality

OPINION INTERVIEWS

While personal opinions may surface in other forms of interviewing, the thoughts or opinions (whether right or wrong) of the interviewee are in the spotlight in this type of interview.

The opinion interview is usually applied in broadcasting to support expanded news formats. A common form of this type of interview is the “man on the street” interview. The broadcaster stations himself in a busy public area and stops individuals to ask a question on a specific issue. Your station manager might send you out to ask for opinions or comments on a radical new fashion or fad, the completion of a commissary or base exchange, the outcome of a sporting event or countless other situations.

Commercial stations usually ask a question dealing with a highly controversial issue. However, policy dictates that NBS detachments and other military broadcast outlets refrain from posing questions that would adversely affect the morale of U.S. personnel or serve to undermine the commander’s authority. Check with your supervisor or the PAO if you plan to do this type of interview.

When you use the opinion interview, avoid the “stacked deck” method of gathering data — that is, do not seek comments from one particular group of people. Gather your responses from young and old, male and female and people of various ethnic backgrounds. This will give your completed program credibility.

In addition, do not ask a “loaded” question during an opinion interview. Note the following example:

Example: “Excuse me sir, don’t you think the new commissary is being constructed in an inaccessible location?”

Such a question leads the interviewee toward a particular response. In the preceding example, chances are very good the interviewee will respond with a yes answer. (Formulating interview questions will be covered later in this chapter.)

Before you conduct an opinion interview, prepare your questions in advance and make sure you research the topic thoroughly. The audience does not expect the

man on the street to be an expert, but it expects the interviewer to be thoroughly knowledgeable of the subject being discussed.

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

The information interview is the most common form of interview used at NBS detachments. The civilian broadcast equivalent is the public service interview. Your subject maybe the chief master-at-arms discussing local activities during Crime Prevention Week or the MWR director talking about what activities are planned at the recreation center. You might do an interview with a physician for a health series or the CO for your weekly captain's call.

Whatever the topic may be, your goal during the information interview is to inform the audience. You should research the topic and prepare your questions well in advance. You do not have to show your questions to the interviewee before the program, but it helps if you give your subject an idea of what you will ask This helps you keep your topic on track during the interview.

As a Navy broadcaster, you may be assigned to cover a wide range of adverse news situations. When you conduct an interview in conjunction with an accident or disaster, be sensitive to the feelings of others. Be careful how you phrase your questions and watch your tone of delivery. Use tact in finding out the five Ws and H and double-check your facts. If you need assistance in gathering the facts, consult your colleagues in the public affairs office.

PERSONALITY INTERVIEWS

Another form of interview often assigned to Navy broadcasters is the personality interview. In this case, the person is important because of what happened to him, what he has done or the position he holds. It may be a timely feature story interview, a regular series or a celebrity interview.

During the personality interview, you must be versatile enough to make your delivery match the event. You must be sensitive to the situation and not antagonize the interviewee by making light of something he takes seriously.

Often, Navy broadcasters will be assigned to interview famous recording artists, motion picture stars or sports celebrities. Be aware that celebrities are accustomed to being interviewed and are well-seasoned at this art. If you are not careful, the celebrity you are interviewing may try to run the show.

Again, the key to producing a good personality interview is research. Read every available newspaper or magazine article on your subject. Know about his past, his rise to success, what he is doing now and his plans for the future. Write intelligent and stimulating questions. Personality subjects appreciate new material and grow weary of answering the same questions time and time again.

INTERVIEW METHODS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Recognize the most common interview methods.

What method should you use to conduct an interview? The answer depends on the subject, time, place and other intangibles that make each interview different.

In most circumstances, you will use one of the following three interview methods to get the required information for your program:

- Scripted
- Semi-scripted
- Ad-lib

SCRIPTED

In the scripted interview, all the questions and answers are prepared in advance and the interviewee(s) simply read(s) the prepared text.

While certain high-ranking officers and officials involved in sensitive or security areas may prefer this method, the scripted interview must not sound like it is being read. If it does, then the program becomes stilted and the conversational aspect of the interview is lost. Likewise, listeners or viewers will lose interest and tune out the message you are trying to deliver.

Unless security or policy concerns dictate the use of the scripted interview, you should avoid it.

SEMI-SCRIPTED

The semi-scripted interview method is the best for most interviews. With this interview, the interviewer researches the subject and interviewee, discusses possible questions in advance and perhaps even rehearses the interview. This method provides an excellent balance between the ad-lib (covered next) and the fully scripted methods and is personal, yet focused.

AD-LIB

While all interviews should be conversational, the ad-lib method can carry this to the extreme. The unprepared atmosphere of the “just sit down and start talking” method can cause stuttering, repeated questions or answers, off-the-subject discussions, long pauses and security or propriety violations. For these reasons, you must be focused when you use the ad-lib interview method.

Areas where the ad-lib method can be used include occasions of spontaneous news, such as on-the-scene reports and other “live” topics of interest.

INTERVIEW FORMAT

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Recognize the areas that comprise the format of an interview.

Now that you know the different types of interviews and the methods with which to conduct them, we will examine the standard interview format. Simply stated, all interviews have the following three parts:

- The opening
- The body
- The closing

THE OPENING

The opening clearly identifies you, your subject and the topic. This allows your audience to know “up front” whether the interview has any direct interest to them. Additionally, the opening can give your location to establish a local tie-in or explain any background noises.

THE BODY

The body is the interview itself — the actual questions and answers. At this point, the interview takes shape and becomes a reality.

THE CLOSING

The closing is an abbreviated form of the opening. During the closing, you can summarize briefly the content of the interview and once again identify yourself and your guest.

The opening and closing may be the most important parts of the program, since the opening grabs the

audience’s attention and the closing provides a conclusion to the story being told.

After you have determined the focus of the interview and formulated your questions, you may write and record the opening and closing before you talk to your guest (if time permits). If you want ambient (natural) sounds for the opening and closing of a radio interview, take your script along and read it at the interview site. For television, memorize those parts you will do on camera. Of course, if you need additional information that you will gather during the interview, you can record the opening and closing afterward.

Keep in mind that you may deviate from this interview format. Be creative with visuals or audio and vary the wording of the opening and closing so your audience is not barraged with “carbon copy” interviews.

LIVE AND TAPED INTERVIEWS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the types of live and taped radio and television interviews.

Only under the most extraordinary conditions will you conduct a live television interview; therefore, we will not cover it in this section. However, when you plan a radio interview, you should consider whether you want to present it live or on tape and address the concerns of taped television interviews. Both the live and taped interview methods are covered next.

LIVE INTERVIEWS

Live interviews, especially opinion interviews, are difficult to control from both a propriety and sensitivity aspect. However, there are several ways you can conduct live interviews on radio. They are as follows:

- Studio
- Remote
- Telephone

Studio

The studio interview is usually either a personality or informative interview. Make sure you have enough microphones in the studio for all interview participants. Although a common setting for a live radio interview, the studio interview tends to present a sterile atmosphere. Additionally, a strange location may intimidate the guest, preventing him from really “opening up.”

Remote

The remote interview is either the informative, personality or “man on the street” type of interview and it is often conducted at a specific event. The major disadvantages of a remote interview are the limitations in station equipment and the lack of control over the environment. Nevertheless, this type of interview gives you the advantage of timeliness.

Telephone

The telephone interview can be either an opinion, an informative or personality interview. Good audio levels are sometimes hard to get during a telephone interview, so make sure you consult your engineer before airing the interview live. Furthermore, make sure you inform the interviewee of your intentions before you air the discussion live.

TAPED INTERVIEWS

The taped or “canned” interview is the preferred method of presenting a radio or television interview. Although it usually lacks action, presence and spontaneity, the taped interview gives you total control of timing, format and content and it allows you to choose the means or location to bring out the best in your guest and subject.

When you tape an interview from a remote site, make sure the background noise enhances the interview, rather than disrupt it. Your knowledge of the directional capabilities of microphones and selecting the correct one will help you in this area.

You can respond quickly to news events by taping interviews over the telephone. Use only portions of the interview as news inserts or actualities because the audio quality is generally poor and would become distracting over a long period. If your questions are to be used as part of the interview or actuality, make sure the audio levels are balanced.

You may have no choice as to whether you do a television interview in the studio or as a remote. If you do have a choice, the studio is preferred for a self-contained interview program. The studio provides a controlled environment. The sets are ready, shots and camera movements are planned, audio is checked well in advance and the crew is prepared long before the interview begins. As you learned in Chapter 14, the set determines the tone of the interview. Viewers form their first impression from the set. It should complement the interview and not compete for the viewers’ attention.

Many of the radio or television interviews you do will not be in a studio. By recording an interview on location, you add excitement, realism and a sense of being there. Often an interview subject is much more comfortable in his own office or surroundings — rather than in a studio — and this usually leads to a better interview.

Before you tape a remote interview (if time permits), survey the location to avoid problems. Your primary consideration should be checking the acoustics and deciding if ambient noise will be distracting. The use of background noise can enhance the interview if it is unobtrusive and blended at a level that does not overpower the conversation. Remember that your equipment may record noise you are not aware of from air conditioning or other electronic equipment. Identify an alternate location if you think you will encounter problems.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the preparatory considerations of radio and television interviews.

The preparation considerations for radio and television interviews are similar. Whether you are assigned an interview or tasked to develop the program yourself, thorough planning is essential.

In this section, we cover the following four basic interview planning steps:

- Arranging the interview
- Researching the subject
- Formulating questions
- Arranging transportation

ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW

Before you arrange an interview, make sure the potential interviewee is an expert on the subject. Just because Ens. Isobar works in the weather office does not mean she knows the most about hurricanes and tornadoes.

Once you know who you want to interview, call that person and identify yourself by name, rank and office. Tell him what subject(s) you want to cover and suggest a time, date and location.

End the conversation by recapping the arrangements agreed upon. If the interview is more than a day away, contact him a few hours in advance to confirm the arrangements.

RESEARCHING THE SUBJECT

By this time, you should know the important role research plays in interviewing. Your audience expects you to be knowledgeable and the interviewee expects you to know about him or the topic of the interview. The more you know, the better will be your questions. In fact, it is a good idea for you to go into an interview knowing all the answers to the questions you will ask

The following are some tips to help you research your subject:

- Check with the appropriate public affairs office for a biography or fact sheet if the story involves military equipment, a distinguished visitor or key officer. Also look for guidance regarding topics that might be sensitive in nature.
- Gather useful background materials at the library (magazine or newspaper articles, encyclopedias, reference books, technical manuals, etc.).
- Know where and how to find the point of contact for the subject.
- Seek local expertise at the appropriate agency and talk to these people about the subject or topic of your interview. (This adds depth and background to the program.)

Let your research material guide the interview, not control it. While conducting the interview, remember that you represent the audience who does not have the facts you have.

FORMULATING QUESTIONS

The key to a good interview is your asking clear, concise questions. Determine the focus of your interview and formulate your questions around a primary idea. Be prepared to leave yourself open to new information you may not have known. You might have to switch your focus or incorporate new information into your final product.

Different types of interviews have unique approaches with varying question types. The length of time you have also determines the questions you can ask. If you have ample time, you can discuss the topic

at length. On the other hand, if time is at a premium, word your questions to get to the point quickly.

Keep the following suggestions in mind when you formulate your interview questions:

- Ask open-ended questions — questions that cannot be answered with only a “yes” or “no” reply. For example, if you are interviewing the head coach of a football team, you would ask “Describe your team’s attitude for today’s game,” instead of, “Is your team up for today’s game?” If you must ask a question that is answered by yes or no, ask the interviewee to explain his answers in more detail. Further, by using the five Ws and H as the first word in your question, you assure yourself of more than a yes or no reply.
- Be simple and direct. Do not beat around the bush in asking a question or by asking multiple questions. This only confuses the interviewee and your audience.
- “Off-the-record” conversations are exactly that — off-the-record. Do not ask questions previously discussed in confidence during the interview.
- Avoid asking trite questions. For example: “Today our guest is Senator Spike Moss, Republican from Hawaii. How are you today?”
- Do not ask your guest embarrassing or antagonistic questions. For example: “Coach, you gave your catcher the steal sign with two outs and your team down by seven runs. He was thrown out easily at second base. This violates a basic baseball strategy even a 5-year-old would understand. Why did you do it?”
- Avoid using military jargon. If you must use jargon or acronyms, explain them. Do not assume your audience knows the topic as well as you and the interviewee know it.
- Do not comment on responses in trite ways or act surprised. For example: “I agree” or “You don’t say!”
- Use questions that will interest your audience. Ask yourself what it is they would like to know from the subject.
- Prepare more questions than you think you will need. This will ensure the best possible coverage of the topic.

ARRANGING TRANSPORTATION

“You can’t get there from here.” That is exactly what will happen if you do not plan your transportation requirements early. The availability of transportation varies from command to command. Regardless of whether your unit has its own vehicle or you rely on a motor pool, advance coordination is necessary. In some cases, the organization you are assigned to cover may provide transportation. However, you should not depend on it. Getting to the interview site is your responsibility.

EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the equipment considerations that apply to radio and television interviews.

You must pay particular attention to the technical aspects of interviews, especially those for television. As you discovered in Chapter 14, any television production is a complex team operation, which means a lot of planning will go into the interview.

TELEVISION

As the talent of a studio interview for television, your involvement with the actual setup procedures (lights, cameras, etc.) will be limited. You must remain focused on the task at hand — preparing for the interview.

The opposite is true when you shoot interviews at remote locations. You will be accompanied by another member of the ENG team, and between the two of you, you must handle the duties on both sides of the camera.

The following is a checklist you can use to prepare for a television interview at a remote location:

- Check your equipment cables to make sure you have the right ones and they are all working.
- Check all batteries the day before the interview. If they are not sufficiently charged, you can charge them overnight.
- Pack a sufficient amount of videocassettes and make sure they are either new or bulk erased.
- Check the condition of the camera and the camera lens.

- Run a test with the camera, recorder and microphones to make sure each component functions properly.
- Inventory all of your gear — the camera viewfinder, cables, microphones, spare batteries, spare videocassettes, headsets, lighting gear and other necessary equipment.
- Run a test of the lighting kit to make sure it works properly.
- Check your transport cases and containers to make sure they are available and are in good condition with working latches.

RADIO

Use the following checklist to help you prepare for a radio interview:

- Check the record and playback functions on your reel-to-reel or cassette tape recorder. Make sure you are recording at the right speed. If necessary, clean the heads or have it done by an engineer.
- Make sure the microphones are working and check the quality of the audio. You may have state-of-the-art equipment and the best technical crew around, but it is best for you not to leave anything to chance.
- If batteries are used to power the recorder or operate the microphone, make sure they are fresh and take along spares.
- If you plan to use AC current, make sure there is an electrical outlet close to the interview location and that the power cord will reach.
- Spot-check the playback after the interview to be sure you have something on tape, but do not give the interviewee the opportunity for a retake.

HELPFUL INTERVIEW HINTS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Recognize the helpful hints used in radio and television interviews.

You have selected the interview method and format, arranged the interview, researched the subject, formulated the questions, arranged transportation and checked your equipment. Everything is on track and pointing toward a successful interview. What else should you do?

Although not an all-inclusive list, the following helpful hints will make the difference between a good interview and a great interview.

BE PROMPT

Nothing is more exasperating than an interviewer who has little concern for timing. You should arrive at the interview site well before the scheduled time to set up the lights, camera and the recording equipment. When you are late for an interview, your subject may be less cooperative than he might have been, and in some cases, it may mean less time for you to ask all those important questions.

MAKE YOUR SUBJECT FEEL COMFORTABLE

If this is your subject's first interview, he will probably be nervous. Some common signs of nervousness include the following behaviors:

- Tapping one's pencil or fingers on the desk
- Infrequent or nonexistent eye contact
- Pulling away from the microphone
- Excessive stuttering or stammering
- Very short answers to your questions
- Frequent interruptions of your questions

Sometimes you can make your subject feel more comfortable by talking about other things, and therefore, take his mind off the interview. You can do this during a spot break for live interviews or at a logical stopping point for taped interviews. Furthermore, since everyone has a sense of personal space or a "comfort zone," you should select a seating arrangement that your guest finds comfortable. One caveat to this strategy is that you should not compromise the quality of the finished product in favor of comfort. Explaining your technical requirements to the interviewee will help.

BE ATTENTIVE

The most important characteristic of a good interviewer is being a good listener. Your subject will be more cooperative if he perceives that you are interested in what he has to say. Good eye contact and your making the appropriate responses at the right time will show the interviewee that you are paying attention and want to know more about the subject.

Always listen to what your subject is saying. Some interviewers are more concerned about what they are going to ask, rather than what the subject is saying — **stay clear of this trap.** Interviewees occasionally answer the question you are about to ask, so be alert and adjust your questioning strategy accordingly.

By being an active listener and asking the appropriate questions, you can keep your interview on track and get the information you need in as short a time as possible. However, if you receive obscure, contradictory or confusing answers to your questions, ask follow-up questions to clarify the point. If the interviewee strays in his answer to a question, rephrase or repeat the question to get him back on track.

When you listen attentively, you also may pick up on a fact you did not know about and slip in effective follow-up questions.

Visualize the editing process while you are recording the interview. If your subject tends to ramble when answering questions, pay close attention to the responses to know when the question is answered, and therefore, when you can edit.

APPEARANCE

Your personal appearance is always important, whether in your day-to-day duties or when you conduct interviews for radio and television. Any violation of Navy uniform regulations, grooming standards or body fat guidelines is particularly obvious on camera and will be noticed by hundreds (or possibly thousands) of people. Your appearance can enhance your credibility or detract from it, so check your appearance thoroughly before the interview.

POST PRODUCTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the procedures used to wrap up radio and television interviews.

Once you have completed talking to the interviewee and you are back at your studio or office, immediately review the interview tape while it is still fresh in your mind. The following tips will help you put together your program or story with better efficiency:

- Make a run sheet for your radio interview listing questions, answers and good edit locations. Before you preview the footage for your television interview, reset the tape counter to zero, then log each scene on a shot sheet by

number in the order it appears on the tape. Check for acceptable audio, video and picture composition.

- Be certain your topic does not violate security or the policies stated in *PA Regs*. Your interview must not be libelous, violate host country sensitivities (if you are assigned overseas) or breach an individual's privacy.
- Make sure audio levels match at edit points.
- Protect the credibility of the interviewee. Since it is possible for you to delete, add or rearrange

words, sounds, sentences and entire paragraphs while editing the interview, be especially careful not to change the meaning of what the interviewee has said.

- Make a final check of the finished product before you give it to your supervisor. Examine the content. Does the interview tell the story? Are the questions answered? Is it concise and interesting? Is it factual? Check the technical quality of the final product for clean edits and good audio or video.